

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

### Helene Martinsson-Wallin

*How did you get into archaeology, and specifically Easter Island archaeology? What triggered your interest?*

During my childhood I was surrounded by archaeological remains. The two runic stones close to my kinder garden and school were intriguing and a hilltop used by the Vikings for beacon fires was used by the community during the festivities the last day in April when all Swedes celebrate the coming of the spring by lighting big bonfires and feasting. Later on the area has also proven an assembly place during the Bronze Age and remarkable and unique rock carvings has been found. The curiosity about past remains eventually lead to studies at Uppsala University and specialising in studies about stone age societies on Åland and Gotland Islands in the Baltic Sea. The interest to know more about traditional and family based Island societies and ceremonial monuments got a boost when one of my professors gave a lecture on Pacific Island societies. This eventually lead me (along with my fiancé Paul) to travel to the Pacific where we met the late ethnographer Bengt Danielsson and his wife Marie-Thérèse in 1985. Studies in Bengt's extensive library in their home on Tahiti and participation in archaeological excavations as well as inspiring meetings with Professor Arne Skjølsvold and Professor Roger Green during our 5 months trip in the Pacific resulted in an honours thesis at University of Stockholm. The interest to go back and carry out further studies at a graduate level was awakened. The following year professor Arne Skjølsvold offered me and Paul a once in lifetime chance: to join him to Easter Island and carry out archaeology at Anakena and later on begin our graduate studies at the newly opened research library at the Kon-Tiki Museum.

*Who or what do you consider as your most significant influence (scientific or otherwise) either as a person or a particular work (or series of works)?*

Arne Skjølsvold who was a professor at the University of Oslo and later the head of the research institute at the Kon-Tiki Museum has been a very important mentor, colleague and friend ever since the first day we met. I have also been very inspired by my kind and knowledgeable professor Bo Gräslund at Uppsala and in addition my friend, colleague

and Rapanui archaeologist Sonia Haoa, a role model for Pacific Island women, is constantly an inspiration and of course my husband, friend and colleague Paul has been a big inspiration and discussion partner over the years. On a theoretical level I have for example been inspired by writings of Tilley, Braudel and Bourdieu.

*What theory or project of yours turned out to be different from what you had expected as, for example, a complete surprise?*

Every archaeological project is like an adventure. The way things happen or not happen on Rapa Nui could sometimes

be very surprising, but I think that the Samoa project, which started out in 2002 on several levels have been a surprise to me. It started out by recovering a big mound from the jungle and that was an eye opener for me, as for the way chiefdom societies worked. It has also placed archaeology and cultural heritage management on the public agenda in Samoan. It has also given me the opportunity to start an archaeological program on Samoa for Samoans in collaboration with the National University of Samoa. To my surprise the landowning family of the Pulemelei mound is of Swedish decent and their closest Swedish relative lives on my home island of Gotland!



Helene Martinsson-Wallin, Gotland, Sweden, 2006

*As a renowned female archaeologist, have you found that your sex played a role in making your research projects more difficult, or perhaps easier? Would you encourage women to go into the field of archaeology?*

I would certainly encourage more women to go into archaeology especially concerning graduate studies and to enter high academic positions. At undergraduate level, in contract archaeology and lower positions, it seems as if there are c. 50-50% men and women, but still it is the men who control most of the academic writing and positions, thus influencing how the past is perceived and presented.

*What would you have done if you had not pursued your current line(s) of research and interests?*

In archaeology I would have pursued Scandinavian Stone Age studies (I still actually do!) but I was also on my way to continue graduate school in the field of physical anthropology at University of Michigan. However, initially I was thinking of pursuing other careers as landscape architect or work with industrial design. To be able to create good envi-

ronments or deliver good design to many people at low costs would have been fun as well.

*What was your best Eureka moment?*

Four moments of interesting finds really have given me the goose pimples; The first was when we found the Polynesian Rat bones (*Rattus exulance*) in the earliest cultural layers at 'Anakena during the 1987 year excavation. The second was when we found ancient foot prints in the clay excavating at Tukume in northern Peru in 1989 and the third was when we found a complete *moai* eye in the storage at the Kon-Tiki museum that had been found in a cave and referred to as an oil lamp in the catalogue. The forth event was when I called up Paul in Samoa who was the acting field director in 2002, and he told me that he had found pottery at the Pulemelei site during the last day of the excavation. Another interesting moment has been when we in 1984 puzzled together a cranium from a woman buried in the court yard at a Megalith grave on Gotland and could see that she had been trepanated but had survived the operation.

*What do you hope to accomplish (in archaeology) on Easter Island in the future?*

I hope to be able to teach more about the fascinating discipline of archaeology to young Rapa Nui students and share my knowledge. I also hope to be able to carry on my project concerning views on Rapa Nui cultural identity in a long time perspective and get to the bottom of issues concerning chronology especially the initial colonisation and cultural affinities to the east and west of Rapa Nui. If possible also more research on the ceremonial sites.

*What is your favorite Easter Island site and why?*

'Orongo; the scenery is just un-believable but 'Anakena is also close to my heart since I spent many months excavating there

*What myth or misinformation about Easter Island would you like to dispel?*

The collapse theory where the Rapanui actually are pictured as poor sods destroying their own Island and then had to resort to eat away on each other. Colonial, political and religious factors have according to my opinion been far more destructive to the culture. I would also like to dispel that the "Aku Aku" expedition in the 50's "robbed" the island for many ancient remains. The majority of the cultural objects (the cave stones) that were taken from the Island by Heyerdahl were produced by Rapanui during the visit. It is really a two-way situation and it is true that the Easter Island exhibition at the Kon-Tiki Museum containing finds from Rapa Nui but this also attract tourists to know more about Rapa Nui and visit the Island. More concerning this theme can be seen in a special exhibition at the Museo Padre Sebastián Englert (see short communication by Olaug Andreassen in this issue).

*What's the most important thing you'd like visitors (or scientists, for that matter) to know about Easter Island?*

That we already in 1987 showed that Rapa Nui probably was settled from Polynesia between 1200-1000 years ago. When I have evaluated the dates and done further excavations of the *ahu* this will show that the ceremonial sites on Rapa Nui are earlier dated than other huge monuments in East Polynesia.

*What advice would you give to a person interested in Easter Island archaeology or anthropology (or these fields generally)?*

It is of vital importance that you have to have a good archaeological education and background and also the ability to study and interpret the data both on a specific and general level. Never forget that archaeology/anthropology is a matter of both theory and practice and that "fame and glory" is not recommend to be the thing you should seek when pursuing archaeology in this famous place.

*What are you currently reading?*

Since I have persuade myself to be on some kind of vacation for the moment, I'm currently reading a crime novel called Nobel's Last Will by the Swedish author Liza Marklund and also Utopia by Sir Thomas More written in 1516. Otherwise just finished evaluating a doctoral thesis and students assignments are lined up.

*Date and place of birth?*

I was born in the town of Norrköping East Sweden, a sunny day (19<sup>th</sup>) in March 1959.

## REVIEWS

### Beyond Horrible

*A Review by Shawn McLaughlin*

### Blue Planet & Beyond

by Jeffrey T. Barbour

321 pages with 36 b/w photos and illustrations

ISBN 978-1-4116-7161-4 6"x9" hardcover

Golden Phoenix Publishing, Olympia, Washington

MOST RAPANUIPHILES WOULD LIKELY AGREE that there are two kinds of books published about our favorite island – those we're glad to have and those we wish we could, in the words of Nicholas Cage's character in *The Rock* (while describing VX nerve gas), "disinvent". Cage's character goes on to say the nerve gas is "very horrible". And this is, alas, the best way to describe Jeff Barbour's *Blue Planet & Beyond*. I'm not saying this to be mean-spirited but as a warning to prospective purchasers to save their money; there are far better researched, better written, and better printed books to be had. And as a warning to would-be "authors"... for the